Precipitation Analysis Instructions Using PRISM and GIS

In order to increase the accuracy of regional rainfall estimates, DWR uses a GIS format to calculate and analyze California's complex precipitation patterns. After several attempts at modeling historical precipitation using the model techniques available within ESRI's ArcView 3.2 and the Parameter-elevation Regressions on Independent Slopes Model (PRISM) model developed by Oregon State University, we chose to use the PRISM model technique. This modeling technique [independent of the data set used] shows more consistent results statewide than ESRI's modeling system of Inverse Distance Weighted (IDW) interpolator. Both models have their advantages, but the PRISM model accounts for slope, aspect, and elevation among other intricate elements of such modeling. For more detailed information regarding PRISM use the following URL--http://www.ocs.orst.edu/PRISM/gen_toc.html.

The base data use for the 1961-1990 thirty-year normal was taken from the National Weather Service (NWS), California Normal Stations (nearly 400 stations.) These stations were active during the entire 1961-1990 period. Today approximately 95% of them remain in full operation. These stations were compared with the PRISM 1961-1990 map and a difference was calculated for each station. The reason for using the NWS 1961-1990 data sets versus the more current NWS 1971-2000 data set was to ensure consistency in our data comparisons. With further analysis it became clear that PRISM's approach to precipitation and dealing with elevation, slope, and aspect helped create a smooth transition from high mountain stations to low valley floor stations.

The general approach is to obtain the PRISM 30 year normal layer setup in 1000-meter (m) grids, then take the precipitation data for 1998, 2000, and 2001 and create a 1000 m grid layer. These layers are overlaid and map algebra is used to compute variation from the normal layer. Once a difference has been established, the volume of water is computed for each detailed analysis unit (DAU) and planning area (PA) within the State.

The following is a step-by-step procedure for the precipitation modeling for California. First step is to download the PRISM data layer from Oregon State University, Corvallis and convert from an ASCII format to one usable by ESRI's ArcView3.x. PRISM is built on a 4000 m system, so there is a need to resample this system and convert it to a 1000m grid. We so this to have a true and accurate overlay with our 1000 m precipitation data.

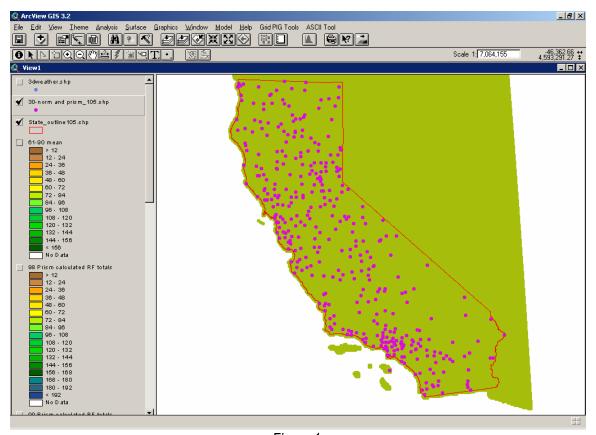


Figure 1.

In this image the yellow-green color is the PRISM point layer in point format (see figure 1). The pink dots represent the location of the weather stations associated with the NWS 30 year Normal. (All station point locations are stored in latitude/longitude coordinates as measured by the NWS.) The red outline shows California's position in regards to the data.

Next, reclassify the PRISM 30 year shape file to display the various precipitation amounts statewide. The breakdown could be a color change every 12 inches, i.e. 0-12 inches is dark brown, 12-24 inches is light brown...84-96 inches is bright green. Experiment with various other increments for the breakdown to see if 12 inches will work best for the data being evaluated.

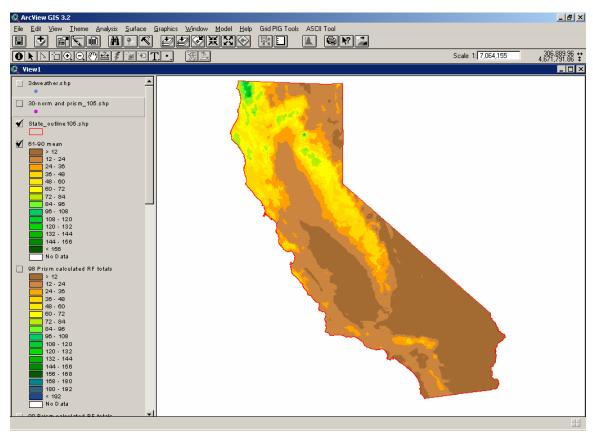


Figure 2.

Now there is a valid 30-year average layer to calculate the variation of precipitation from year to year (see figure 2). These calculations will be done using a feature called the Map Calculator in ArcView. This feature allows the user to do map algebra between similar coverage layers (two or more) or to make adjustments to any single layer. In doing so, it creates another grid based on the mathematical outcome.

With this technique available for multi-layer calculations, gather the available weather data for each of the NWS California Normal Stations for the years 1998, 2000, and 2001 (see figure 3). In the weather station point file, enter the annual precipitation values for each given year into the DBF file.

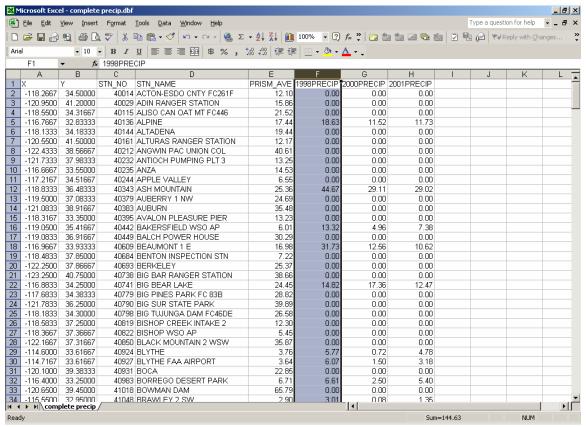


Figure 3.

When the file is fully populated with all the precipitation data, we then use a function called Interpolate Grid. This function takes the data entered into the point file and creates a grid by using IDW interpolation method. This process assumes that each input point has a local influence that diminishes with distance. It weights the points closer to the selected weather monitoring station more than those further away. A specified number of points may be chosen to use in the analysis, or all points within a specified radius, can be used to determine the output value for each precipitation station. We used the specified number of points approach (see figure 4).

In setting up this grid process one must specify the output grid extent and the output grid cell size. Set the Grid Output Extent and Grid Output Cell Size to the same coverage (see figure 5). Now verify that the cell size is set to 1000 m to match the PRISM 30-year precipitation layer. This helps in assuring that the two grids will overlay each other cleanly. This process is completed for each of our water years.

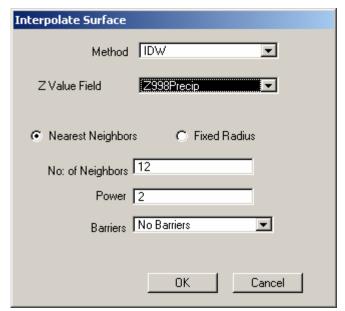


Figure 4.

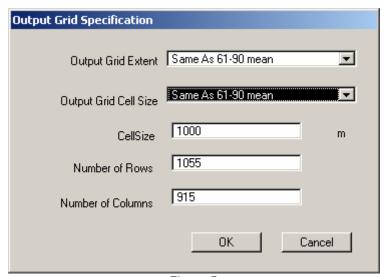


Figure 5.

The PRISM software takes into account the surrounding states of Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona and also Mexico (see figure 1). When creating a grid, IDW builds its data based upon the maximum extent of the image being used. Using this extra data helps create a more realistic picture of California's precipitation picture. Next a tool is used to constrain the data outside of California's borders. This is seen as the light gray color surrounding California and shows the extent of the IDW grid. Each grid will need to be clipped to match the actual border of the State. In this process, the values of the data falling outside of the border are set to zero. Next, a color is attached to the zero values so that California's shape becomes apparent (typical color is set to white for better focus on the key feature). There are tools available for such cropping from the ESRI website: http://www.esri.com/ (homepage) http://arcscripts.esri.com/ (downloadable script page). This shall be done to help in visualizing California's boundaries.

Next do map algebra on the newly created rainfall layers of 1998, 2000, & 2001 (see figure 6). Once the map algebra has been completed, the output coverage will show a difference in percent from the precipitation year (1998, 2000, or 2001) to that of the 1961-1990 thirty-year average. This percent difference is presented as a grid and is now multiplied by the 30-year normal grid. The outcome of this mathematical analysis will be actual precipitation for a given 1000m grid expressed in inches. Like the 30 year average coverage, each year is broken out into a different color every 12 inches, i.e. 0-12 inches is dark brown, 12-24 inches is light brown...84-96 inches is bright green and ending with dark green for all precipitation over 152 inches. Some years may receive more precipitation like 1998 in which totals for some locations totals were over 192 inches. In this case, one must expand the color range for that given year. Other years, like 2001, may require a reduction in the color ranges due to the lack of precipitation.

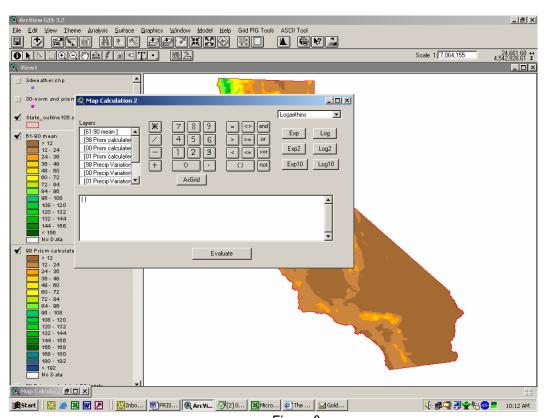


Figure 6.

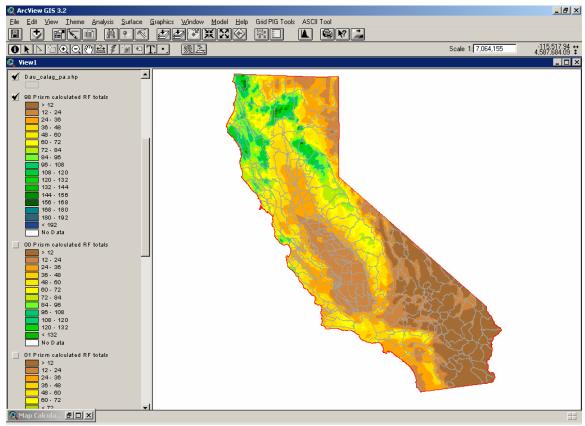


Figure 7.

With each year sub-divided into 12-inch increments, overlay the DAU coverage (see figure 7) to analyze the total volume of precipitation at that geographic level. Once we have a volume of water in a DAU, it can be aggregated up to Planning Areas (PA), Hydrologic Regions (HR), and even the special study area of Mountain Counties (PA 508, 604, & 610-as designated in B160-03). The DAU analysis data encompasses the DAU number, the area in total square meters, the minimum depth of water, the maximum depth of water, the range from minimum to maximum, and the average depth of water for that DAU (see figure 8). With some simple mathematics you can calculate the actual percentage for a DAU in a specific year (see figure 9).

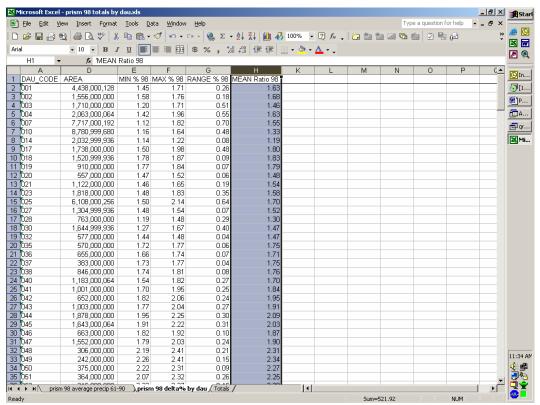


Figure 8.

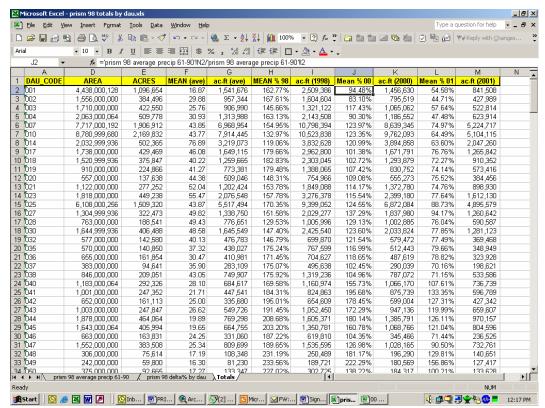


Figure 9.

The DAU data is presented in square meters and a conversion is needed to change this to acres. This conversion ratio is m² * 0.00024710538. Once the area numbers are converted to acres, then multiply the acreage by the DAU average precipitation percentage of mean to get a volume of water for any given location. These numbers are now exported into Microsoft Access and linked with PA and HR tables. This linking gives the flexibility of quickly changing any data set from one geographical unit to another.

As an example the PA totals for California look at the following image for 1998, 2000, & 2001 (see figures 10, 11, & 12 respectively).

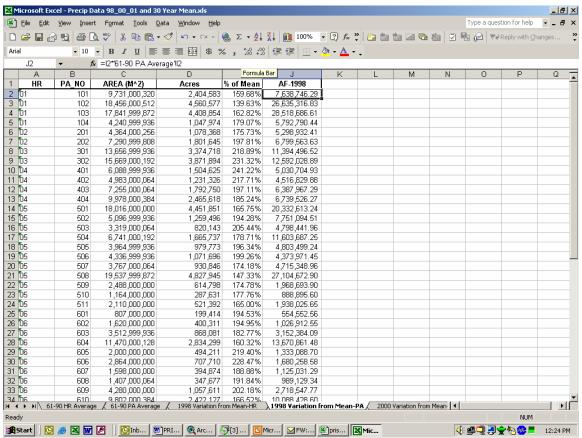


Figure 10.

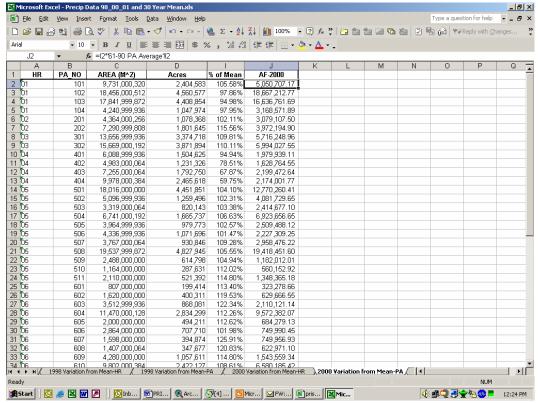


Figure 11.

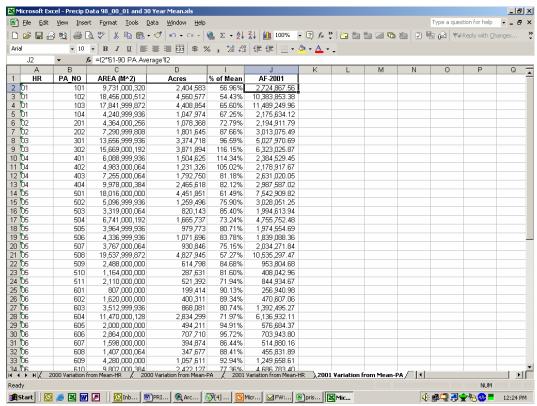


Figure 12.